

Tips for Special Education Home Tips & Tricks

During the times that we are facing, it is safe to say that having our children home for the next five (or more) weeks has simply caught us off guard. None of us were expecting this reality, but now it is one that we have to face. Working with and having a great familiarity with the Special Education community, it is troubling to think of the struggles that some of us may be facing, between trying to have to explain why we are home and trying to figure out how we are going to spend many days in the house. For this reason, I have decided to generate a list of tips that are used in the classroom to help keep our students on task, structured and engaged throughout our days filled with learning. I want to let you know that although these are going to be geared toward completing schoolwork throughout the day, they are EXTREMELY useful for any task that your days will be filled with! Daily routines may include getting dressed, eating or selecting their choice of breakfast, choosing and playing with toys, cleaning our own messes and so on.

Setting Clear Expectations!

We all know how important routines are for our children and with what is going on right now, we know their routines are thrown OFF. That is okay! Having successful days at home with your children and trying to keep them learning can be really simple if you choose to follow these steps. Set **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS** for your child! It is important that your child knows what his or her expectations are for your day. If you are going to be completing school work, discuss that with them in the morning. If it is a weekend and you have errands to run with your child, share that too! You can review simple rules that you have set in place, so your child knows what is expected of them throughout the day. Implementing this routine every day should provide your child with clear expectations of what his or her day will look like.

Start your day with fun questions and conversation, like what day of the week it is, what the weather is outside and you can even begin with a journal question! Starting a journal can be a great strategy that engages your child each morning which will help to generate your at-home routine. Journal questions can be ANYTHING that gets the brain flowing! Depending on your child, you can set expectations that the journal answer will be written, or it can be answered verbally.

Useful Strategies for Setting Clear Expectations:

- Using CLEAR, SIMPLE words to demonstrate desired task
- Using visual aids
- Provide an interactive schedule for the day that children utilize (creating a schedule with an arrow that children move as each task is completed)
- When having your child complete a school-related task, clearly define your expectation. Example: "Amanda, can you write down ONE thing that you did this weekend in your journal?" Elicit ONE answer from your child first and build off of that if you see fit.



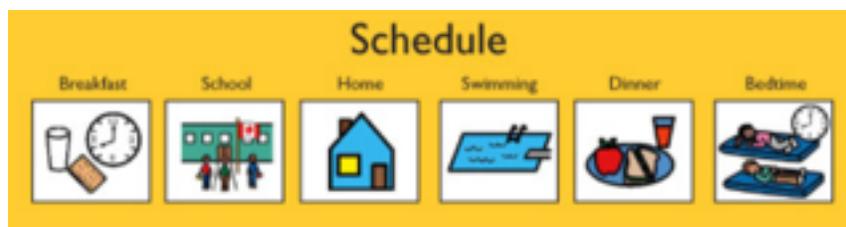
(2020). Duct Tape Arrow Magnets Retrieved from <http://www.foliver.com/diy/22-cute-and-easy-clothespin-crafts-youll-love/29/>

Creating a Schedule:

Scheduling is one of the most important tools that we can provide to our children to keep them on task and aware of their expectations. When students are provided with a schedule, they understand how their day begins, what it will consist of and most importantly they always know what will come next. Structure is a crucial part of our children's days and creating a personal schedule will be extremely useful in giving them the structure that they need.

Useful Strategies for Creating a Schedule:

- Make it personal! Allow your child to help with the creation of this schedule, by coloring, painting or adding stickers to make it their own.
- Use visual aids to create each event. If your child loves eating cereal for breakfast, provide a picture of cereal so your child knows that will be breakfast for that day. If your child will be working on their journal question, provide a picture of a journal!
- Create an interactive tool that your child can physically move from one event to the next throughout the day. A clothespin is a tool that I've found to be really useful, as well as decorated paper that is cut into the shape of an arrow, popsicle sticks decorated how they like it, or even a picture of their smiling face 😊



(2020). Schedule Retrieved from <https://www.houstonisd.org/Page/51539>

Child Choice/Being a Leader!

Child choice is one of the most effective strategies that you can implement to receive engagement from your child! When deciding what school work or daily activity to begin with, let your child choose, while still controlling the situation! For example: “Johnny, I loved your journal entry! We have some school work to do today, what would you like to start with? We can start with **READING** (visually present), we can do **MATH**, or we can work on our **WRITING**! Be sure to limit choices to avoid overwhelming your child. Once your child chooses, adjust your daily schedule accordingly. Place the arrow or pointer of choice on that task and begin!

Useful Strategies for Child Choice:

- **FIRST, THEN** statements! First then statements are **EXTREMELY** effective for any transitional period for a child, which relates closely to setting clear expectations. If your child chooses to start with reading, you can motivate them and respond in this way: “Great! **FIRST**, we will read, **then** we will take a break!”
- If they begin a task and are having a hard time, remember to keep child choice in mind. As the teacher/parent, it is up to us to intervene where we see fit. Example: “Okay Johnny! I see that reading is upsetting you right now. Would you like to pick another subject to work on?” Intervening in a calm tone and letting the child choose what he/she would like to work on next is a useful strategy in calming behavior and completing tasks accordingly. If you choose to have the child continue completing that task, keep reminding them of the break that they will be receiving upon completion.

Rewards!!!

Rewards, rewards, rewards. Can I say it enough?! Rewards are SO important when working with our children! Who doesn't love to work toward something special? And how amazing is the feeling of earning it? After your child has selected a task to work on, please supply your children with an array of options of rewards that you know they will love. Rewards that I have used in the past include time to draw on a personal white board, coloring with crayons and markers, jumping on a trampoline, taking a walk, playing with toys, or playing a computer game. Once they begin completing the task, refer to that reward as you see fit.

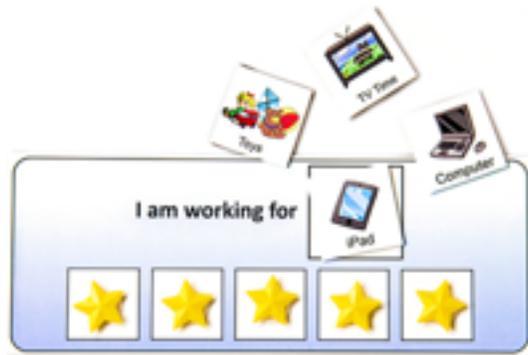
Useful Strategies for Rewards:

- Ask your child what they are working for. This sets the tone of their reward and it will work to keep them on task throughout it. Example: “Johnny, what are you working for? You chose coloring? Awesome! You'll be there in no time!”
- Use it to redirect. If your child seems to be off task, redirect using the reward in place. “Johnny, I know you really want to color. **FIRST** complete your writing, **THEN** you can color!”
- Create a token board to help them reach their goal! A token board is a visual representation of what they are working for. If their reward is to read a book, you can show a picture of a book. Your child will earn “tokens” throughout their task, and once their number of tokens is earned, they have just earned their reward! “Johnny, I love the way you just wrote a complete sentence! You earned a token!”

- Remember, you can give tokens and also take away if there is undesired behavior occurring. “Oh no Johnny, I do not like the way you’re playing with your pencil instead of writing, I am going to take one token away.”

*Some children may be sensitive to the idea of losing a token. It may cause anxiety and worry that they will never get it back. If your child reacts in this way, utilize the token board as a fully positive reinforcement. Meaning, instead of taking a token away for negative behavior, prompt them and say, “Oh no Johnny, I was just about to give you another smiley face but then you threw your pencil. I hope I can give you this smiley face soon.” This adjustment should be effective. *

- TIME LIMIT ON REWARD!** This is very important to ensure that although your child is being given a break to enjoy their reward, this is a timed activity and work must resume when it comes to an end. There are many fun ways to time these rewards. Some examples include sand timers, stopwatches on YouTube or even using music! “You can jump on the trampoline for one whole song! Then we are going to get back to work.”



(2020). Token Board Retrieved from <https://www.nationalautismresources.com/token-board/>

Brain Breaks

Brain breaks are so essential for your child in doing just that- giving their brain a break! After working hard on whatever task is being completed, brain breaks are created to allow your child to relax and shift their focus and energy into some movement that is very necessary for their brain and body! The brain breaks that we are providing are video-based and allow your child to get up and move! These activities are really fun for students and they look forward to them each and every day.

Useful Tips for Using Brain Breaks:

- Praising your child for all the hard work they have done!
- Making it clear why they have earned this brain break and celebrate with them!

- Remain consistent with student choice and allow them to choose what type of brain break they are interested in
- Utilize time limit during the brain break as well- allow your child to view the video once, but not more than that until all of our work is done!